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AN
A D D R E S S

TO *R. Buxton*
THE BISHOPS;

UPON THE SUBJECT OF A LATE LETTER
FROM ONE OF THEIR LORDSHIPS
TO CERTAIN CLERGY IN HIS DIOCESE.

WITH THE LETTER PREFIXED.

STAY, MY LORD,
AND LET YOUR REASON WITH YOUR CHOLER QUESTION,
WHAT 'TIS YOU GO ABOUT.

SHAKESPEARE.

HEAT NOT A FURNACE FOR YOUR FOE SO HOT,
THAT IT WILL SINGE YOURSELF. WE MAY OUT-RUN,
BY OVER-SWIFTNESS, THAT WHICH WE RUN AT,
AND LOSE BY OVER-RUNNING.

IBID.

L O N D O N:

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M DCC XC.

[PRICE SIX-PENCE.]



The Letter referred to in the following pages.

REV. SIR,

SIR W—— M—— has declared himself a candidate to represent the Borough of C—— in the next Parliament: I cannot refrain from declaring that he has my heartiest good wishes. Mr. P——, the present Member, has received the thanks of the Dissenters for the part he took in the late attempt to overthrow our ecclesiastical constitution, by the repeal of the *Corporation and Test Acts*. By this it is easy to guess what part he is likely to take in any future attempt for that purpose.

I hope that I shall not have the mortification to find a single clergyman in my diocese, who will be so false to his own character, and his duty to the established church, as to give his vote to any man who has discovered such principles.

I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your affectionate Brother,

and faithful Servant,

Aug. 24, 1789.

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A N A D D R E S S
T O T H E B I S H O P S, &c.

MY LORDS,

A PAPER has been circulated, bearing the name of a right reverend prelate, which is, on all accounts, so very extraordinary; so dangerous in the principles which it advances; so unbecoming a christian and a protestant in the spirit with which it is written; so indecent and disrespectful to the commons of Great Britain in the matter of constitutional privilege, that I forbear to affix the signature, though from a principle of justice to the writer and myself, I have reprinted the libel. But, my lords, I would not have been thus scrupulous, in suppressing the name of the writer, did I think there was one other man among your order likely to be charged, on any distant day, with having written the letter in question. Let us then

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congratulate

congratulate ourselves that the liberality of our times leaves the fiery and intemperate zeal of anti-christian intolerance to be monopolized by one man, but let us not cease to reprobate the offensive doctrine even in that solitary monopoly, nor to open our minds, as occasion may require, concerning the monopolizer.

LEAVING, therefore, the man to his own reflections, and the attainment of a better temper; we are only interested in the reprehension of that conduct which is destructive of the principles and liberty of christianity, protestantism, and the British constitution;—and involve in its consequences the indelible reproach of the episcopal character. We have had characters on the bench of English Bishops, whose names will be had in everlasting remembrance; and whose example will be followed by many, who, if less illustrious, have not been less deserving. Others, it must be confessed, are left floating, like buoys on the surface of the waters, to warn their successors not to make shipwreck of all that is valuable in the christian and the man,—nor to suffer every amiable virtue of the heart to be extinguished by having a mitre placed on their heads.—Characters, like the scriptures, are designed for imitation, and for—reproof.

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THIS theme might be pursued to considerable length, and not without improvement; but the frantic zeal of an enraged and aspiring ecclesiastic may, in these days, be left to its own correction. The example will do good; it cannot fail to benefit the parties concerned.

THE rescript before us, contains certain articles of impeachment both of the cause and persons against whom it is pointed.—(1) The application for a repeal of the Corporation and Test acts is called “ An Attempt to overthrow our ecclesiastical constitution.” (2) The promoters and patrons of this application, if any such there should be among the clergy of the diocese of — — —, are pronounced to be “ false to their own character, and their duty to the established church.”

IN answer to the first of these charges, it may be observed,—if the ecclesiastical constitution of this country would be overthrown by the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts,—it should seem that the foundation and security of this same ecclesiastical fabric was laid at no earlier a period than the reign of Charles the second; and must have been very feebly built, and cemented with untempered mortar, if now ready to

fall to pieces after so short a lapse of time. In a general way, the ecclesiastical constitution, with all its appending circumstances,—rudis indigestaque moles—is pronounced venerable from its antiquity; but she is here wantonly represented to be in a state of infancy or non-age, and her religion to have received her only support in the proscription of a body of useful and conscientious men, the protestant dissenters, in the time of the most faithless and profligate prince the annals of our country record.

THE truth is; the different vindicators of every established church throw themselves into such a variety of ridiculous attitudes and gestures, that, like posture-masters, there is no agreement or consistency between any two of them.

THE liturgy, the articles, and episcopacy are considered, in an ordinary way, as constituting the chief corner-stone of the building of the church of England; for the scriptures are only represented in the back-ground, and are to be seen very indistinctly at a distance. But, it so happens, that none of these would be, in any way, affected by the proposed repeal, nor are

are comprehended in the intended motion in parliament. It may indeed be, and I believe it is, the hearty wish of all concerned in such application, but not more so of them than of several thousands of clergymen of the church of England,—that the public liturgy should be revised and reformed,—that her articles should be made to give place to the christian scriptures,—and even that the constitution of its episcopacy should be better calculated to superintend, and indeed confined to the superintendency of the clergy. But these matters are neither directly, nor indirectly aimed at by the application for the repeal of the Corporation and Test acts.

THE christian and protestant church of England ought, consistently with its own principles and pretensions, to rest itself upon the gospel of Jesus Christ alone. In every degree in which it departs or deviates from this foundation, it weakens and disfigures the edifice which we are bidden to admire; derives reproach and scandal on the christian name, and will, in the end, hasten its own downfall. For it is not of the church of Rome, or of England, Scotland or Ireland, but—of the church of Christ alone, that

we are assured the gates of the hell shall not prevail against it.

So very little of a prophet does our extraordinary letter-writer appear in my estimation, that I am conscientiously persuaded that the attempt, to which he refers, would, if successful in its issue, greatly contribute to the preservation of the church of England, in the popular sense in which we understand those words.

IF I may be permitted to suppose myself a bishop of this church,—and to have been, for instance, duly elected, consecrated, and to have done homage for the episcopal, or, as it anciently was, archiepiscopal see of St. David's, I will ingenuously declare how the matter now in discussion, would appear to be in the line of duty. If I were a convert from the principles of protestant dissenters maintained by my ancestors, you might expect the exhibition of some extraordinary zeal to recommend myself to any new friends;—from your own excess of candor, or from considerations of particular indulgence to my singular case, you might be disposed to pardon the effects of my distempered imagination.—But, my lords,

I should

I should not be a candidate for your forgiveness and mercy for these offences. From the cool and sober conviction of the true nature and temper of the religion of Jesus Christ;—from my cordial and unqualified assent to the principles of the protestant reformation,—from my regard for the civil constitution of my country, for the principles of universal liberty and impartial justice,—in other words, from my earnest desire of doing to others, what I would have others do to me,—I would MOVE the repeal of the obnoxious acts in question, and of every penal law, whether positive or negative in its operation, that respects religion as such.—If, from the different judgment of a majority of the lords I should not succeed in such motion for a repeal,—I would not leave my name to be censured in after ages, in the general mass of senators, but I would deliver my protest in writing, against the refusal of such repeal, to be preserved among the proceedings of the house. I would PROTEST,—Because, Christ never intended his religion to be the creature of the civil power, much less the engine of oppression; or that the rite instituted in commemoration of his death should be made a qualification

qualification for any public office civil or military.

BECAUSE, such use of the Lord's supper is a gross misapplication and profanation of it, tending to destroy the honor and credit of christianity, by inviting the most unworthy persons to the profession of a particular mode of faith, from the lure of worldly advantages,—and by making men hypocrites.

BECAUSE, no man ought to suffer in life, limb, property, credit or eligibility to civil or military offices for opinions merely religious.

BECAUSE, it is prejudicial to the state, by weakening the other obligations men enter into, inasmuch as the prostitution of the Lord's supper in the ordinary way of a qualification for a civil office will also weaken the oath by which the officer is supposed to be bounden to his duty; and acts in that, and all other respects, only in an inverse direction to the true interest of the state, by familiarizing the abuse of religious institutions,—the breach of solemn engagements, and

and the seclusion of conscientious men from places of trust and confidence.

BECAUSE, the experience of my own country, prior to the restoration of Charles the second, has confirmed the non-necessity of it,—and the northern part of the island flourishes without it at this moment,—and Ireland has lately rejected it, with honor and advantage to herself.—In fine,—because, no christian church ought to require it, and no other christian-protestant church does require it.

THESE reasons, my lords, are so decisive in my mind, that it is to me, perfectly inconceivable, how a christian and a protestant parliament can hesitate to erase from the volumes of its statutes, such unchristian laws. And, when I contemplate the advancement of liberty in the nations on the continent of Europe, by adverting to, establishing, and acting upon the first and pure principles of christian liberty and of civil government, I am not only astonished at the littleness of the boon required,—and at the impolicy of refusing such just and righteous claim,—but feel myself more than half confounded by the temerity of such obstinacy.—But, while I

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fay this, I mean not to menace, but convince ;—not to strike, but to persuade. My heart's desire is to forward the progress of truth and liberty “ by deeds of peace,” but my fixed determined resolution is, never to desert or betray them.

THERE were some of old who are represented to have been so hard to be convinced, as not to be persuaded though one rose from the dead. The same wilful incredulity repeated, will have similar effects. While you, my lords, if you look not to the enlargement of christian liberty, may be dozing over exploded systems of human devices—deaf to the importunities of your fellow christians, fellow men, and fellow citizens,—or, peradventure, lording it over God's heritage,—the harbingers of truth and liberty may be at your very doors :—the word of God, reason, and justice will be heard,—and will not be dismissed with the answer which Felix gave to Paul,—“ Go your way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you.”—The Bastile, long the terror of a great nation, could not resist the first attack ; it had long been the dreaded instrument of oppression, but it is now no more :—the revenues of the church, which

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had been still longer held sacred, and appropriated to the establishment and support of a wretched superstition,—were, by a vote of the national assembly, directed to the relief of national insolvency.

LET us now dispassionately consider for a while, who are most likely, from all present appearances, to be the “ overthowers of our ecclesiastical constitution ?”—Surely not the peaceable appellants and movers of the proposed repeal, not those who have repeatedly supplicated that which they might claim as their right ;—but the obstinate repulsors of their suit,—they who perseveringly refuse to grant that which they themselves must know to be the common gift of God and nature, and to be recognized in the christian dispensation. Nor is it possible for your lordships to conceal your share, in such repulse, by any stifling or clandestine policy. Your influence is fully felt under your own roof, it is sometimes acknowledged in the house of your neighbours: but it is a maxim of law,—*qui facit per alium, facit per se*; and some offenders when taken upon suspicion are easily prosecuted to conviction. I have only to remind you further of a very good rule of prudence, which may be repeated

repeated without any just cause of offence,—
They whose house is made of glass, should be
careful not to be the first to throw stones.

IF it should be thought by any one, that I am recommending this act of justice only as the means of conciliation,—I should be much wronged and mistaken in my motives and intention; I recommend it for the sake of truth, christian liberty, and justice, which constitute the basis of the soundest policy; and having done this, I am, as far as I am personally concerned, wholly uninterested in the event, and will be ready to meet the repulse in all its consequences.

(2.) AFTER what has been already observed, it only remains to confute the charge of treachery in those clergymen in the church of England, in the diocese of — — (in Wales) who shall so far countenance the repeal of those laws we are now discussing, as to give their vote for Mr. — or any other gentleman, who shall be likely to vote for an act for that purpose. They are charged in the present case, with being “ false “ to their own character, and their duty to the “ established church.”

There

THERE is a paramount engagement implied in every admission into the christian ministry to teach and preach the laws of Christ. This principle justified the conduct of our reformers ; and they followed it, as far as they were able to discover it in their day. And that it may not be said that the church knows no such latitudinarian principles, I refer the objectors to the sixth article, and to one of the questions with the corresponding answer to it, in the office for the ordination of priests *.

UPON

* Art. vi. *Of the sufficiency of the holy scriptures for salvation.*—“ Holy scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation : so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”

The form and manner of ordering priests.

The Bishop.

“ Are you persuaded, that the holy scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ ? and are you determined, out of the said scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the scripture ? ”

Answer. “ I am so persuaded, and have so determined, by God’s grace.”

UPON these grounds, and in opposition to the right reverend electioneer, I maintain that every clergyman is “ false to his own character,” as a minister of the gospel, and false “ to his own duty to the established church,” as a protestant establishment, and to his specific engagements therein, if he does not endeavour to promote the true liberty, as well as the true knowlege of the gospel of Jesus Christ;—if he does not labor, and still more if he does not consent, to the establishment of the only justifiable principle of protestantism, in consistency with itself, by maintaining the sufficiency of the scriptures and the right of private judgment. I will add, in respect to the question before us, that he is lukewarm in the service of his master, who sits still, and is inactive, while such a gross prostitution of the Lord’s Supper is required, as the test of qualification for all civil appointments, from the first Lord Commissioner of the treasury to the petty exciseman.

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JAN. 19, 1799

